

June 1, 2010

Utica, NY - U.S. Rep. Michael Arcuri (NY-24) honored Vietnam veteran Sgt. Michael Waskiewicz of Utica with several posthumous service medals at a ceremony held this morning at the Central New York Center for Veterans in Utica, NY. Following the presentation, Arcuri highlighted several pieces of legislation that would benefit local veterans. Arcuri was joined by members of his local Veterans Advisory Committee, which he met with earlier that morning.

"Sgt. Waskiewicz was a true American hero and I am proud to spend this Memorial Day honoring his memory by presenting his family with the service medals he earned in the line of duty," **said Arcuri**. "As we remember the service and sacrifices of those who gave their lives for our country, we must renew our commitment to our nation's three million troops and reservists, their families, and 23 million veterans. I am proud to be part of a Congress that has kept that promise by doing more for our veterans than any other Congress in the history of the United States."

Arcuri was joined by members of his Veterans Advisory Committee in awarding the following posthumous medals to Sgt. Waskiewicz's widow, Diane Waskiewicz, for his service in the United States Army in Vietnam:

- The Purple Heart;
- Meritorious Unit Commendation;
- National Defense Service Medal;
- Vietnam Service Medal with 4 Bronze Stars;
- Combat Infantryman Badge 1st Award;
- Republic of Vietnam Campaign Ribbon with Device;
- Expert Badge with Rifle Bar;
- Sharpshooter Badge with Auto Rifle Bar;
- Marksman Badge with Machine Gun Bar; and
- Parachutist Badge-Basic.

Following the medal ceremony, Arcuri discussed legislation he will be introducing, the Gym Membership Tax Credit for Veterans Act, which would provide any honorably discharged veteran with a refundable tax credit of up to \$250 to join a gym or health facility.

"Our veterans made protecting American lives and interests their first priority and so it is only fitting that we, in turn, make their health and well-being a national priority," **said Arcuri.**

"Providing incentives that encourage veterans to join a gym will not only cut down on the number of clinic visits, but also drastically cut the cost of medication and treatment that the VA is currently paying for while providing a much-deserved benefit to our local veterans."

Over the past three decades the number of overweight and obese individuals in United States has drastically increased - and veterans are no exception to the trend. In 2000, 44% of veterans who used Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities were overweight and 25% were obese, compared to the general population of which 35% were overweight and 20% were obese.

Currently, health club and gym memberships are not authorized under the VA's Medical Benefits Package. While some VA facilities have gyms for veteran use, many of have limited equipment and space. Additionally, many local veterans do not live close enough to a VA facility to make this a viable option.

During one of Arcuri's town hall meetings last year, Mr. Peter Tiller of Rome, NY, highlighted the lack of supports provided by the VA to help veterans lead healthier lifestyles. Following the discussion, Arcuri began drafting the Gym Membership Tax Credit for Veterans Act, which he plans to introduce in the U.S. House of Representatives later this month.

Additionally, Arcuri highlighted several pieces of legislation that he supported this year that would directly impact veterans in New York's 24th Congressional District, including:

- **The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010-** which provides economic assistance to caregivers of veterans and improves health care for veterans;

- **The Retired Pay Restoration Act-** which would permit veterans who are rated less than 50% disabled to receive both their VA disability compensation and their earned military pay;

- **The Military Retirees Health Care Protection Act-** which would prohibit Administration plans to increase health care premiums for military retirees and protect Tricare; and,

- **The Fry Scholarship-** which provides the children of military personnel who died in the line of duty since September 11, 2001, to receive full, four-year college education benefits similar to new GI Bill benefits enjoyed by veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars.

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